

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Criminal Justice Reform Legislation

November 14, 2018

The President. Hello, everybody. Thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it. And thank you very much, everybody. I'm grateful to be here today with Members of the House and Senate who have poured their time—and they really have—their heart, and energy into the crucial issue of prison reform.

A very respected man—Chairman Chuck Grassley—and my friend. Where's Chuck? Chuck? Thank you, Chuck, very much. You've worked hard on this. And Bob Goodlatte. I saw Bob here. Thank you, Bob. Great job. Senators Lindsey Graham, Mike Lee, Tim Scott, Rand Paul; and Doug Collins—fantastic people who've worked so hard, and we appreciate very much what you've done. We really do. Thank you all very much.

Working together with my administration over the last 2 years, these Members have reached a bipartisan agreement. Did I hear the word "bipartisan"?

Representative Douglas A Collins. There you go.

The President. Did I hear? Did I hear that word? [*Laughter*] That's a nice word. Bipartisan agreement on prison reform legislation known as the First Step. And that's what it is; it's a first step. But it's a very big first step.

Today I'm thrilled to announce my support for this bipartisan bill that will make our communities safer and give former inmates a second chance at life after they have served their time. So important.

And I have to tell you, I was called, when I announced and when we all announced together this news conference, by some of the toughest, strongest law enforcement people—including politicians, by the way—who are so in favor of it. And I was actually surprised by some, like, as an example, Mike Lee—[*laughter*—and Rand Paul and others. No, it's got tremendous support at every level. It's really great.

And we're all better off when former inmates can receive and reenter society as law-abiding, productive citizens. And thanks to our booming economy, they now have a chance at more opportunities than they've ever had before. It is true. Our economy is so strong, that when people are getting out of jail, they're actually able to find jobs.

And I have three instances of companies that hired people coming out of prison, and they are so thrilled by the performance of these people. And now they're doing it more and more and more. And a lot of people are seeing this. It's great.

They wouldn't have had the opportunity, frankly, except for the fact that the economy is so strong. And our job market is the lowest and best it's been in over 50 years and seems to be getting even better. Our pledge to hire American includes those leaving prison and looking for a very fresh start: new job, new life. The legislation I'm supporting today contains many significant reforms, including the following:

First, it will provide new incentives for low-risk inmates to learn the skills they need to find employment, avoid old habits, and follow the law when they're released from prison. These incentives will encourage them to participate in vocational training, educational

coursework, and faith-based programs—and I want to thank Paula White, very much, because I know you very much wanted that—thank you, Paula—that reduce their chances of recidivism and, in other words, reduce their chances of going back to prison substantially.

Second, this legislation will allow Federal inmates to be placed closer to their home communities in order to help facilitate family visitation—so important—because we know that maintaining family and community ties is key to successful reentry into our society.

Third, the bill includes reasonable sentencing reforms while keeping dangerous and violent criminals off our streets. In many respects, we're getting very much tougher on the truly bad criminals, of which, unfortunately, there are many. But we're treating people differently for different crimes. Some people got caught up in situations that were very bad.

I give an example of Mrs. Alice Johnson, who served 21 years. And she had, I think, another 25 or so to go. So she would have been in there for close to 50 years for something that other people go in and they get slapped on the wrist, which is also wrong, by the way. Which is also wrong. But I'll never forget the scene of her coming out of prison after 21 years and greeting her family, and everybody was crying—her sons, her grandsons—everybody was crying and hugging and holding each other. It was a beautiful thing to see. It was a very much tough situation.

Among other changes, it rolls back some of the provisions of the Clinton crime law that disproportionately harmed the African American community. And you all saw that, and you all know that; everybody in this room knows that. It was very disproportionate and very unfair.

Throughout this process, my administration has worked closely with law enforcement. Their backing has ensured that this legislation remains tough on crime—it's got to remain very tough on crime—and supports the tremendous work of our police and the tremendous job that law enforcement does throughout our country, our communities. They do an incredible job. We have great respect for law enforcement.

We're honored that seven of the major police organizations, including the Fraternal Order of Police and the International Association of Police Chiefs, have fully endorsed this bill. We could not have gotten here without the support and feedback of law enforcement, and its leaders are here today—two of them—especially Chuck Canterbury of FOP and Chief Paul Cell of IACP. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. I appreciate that very much. And these are two tough cookies. *[Laughter]* They want what's right. They want what's right.

And interesting: If you look at Texas, if you look at Georgia, if you look at Mississippi and Kentucky and some other States that are known as being very tough, these are big supporters of what we're doing. And some of it has been modeled after what they've done. They've done a tremendous job.

My administration will always support the incredible men and women of law enforcement, and we will continue to pursue policies that help the heroes who keep us safe. They are truly heroes.

We also thank the more than 2,000 leaders in the faith community who have signed a letter of support. We have tremendous support within the faith community. Unbelievable support.

Americans from across the political spectrum can unite around prison reform legislation that will reduce crime while giving our fellow citizens a chance at redemption. So if something happens and they make a mistake, they get a second chance at life.

Today's announcement shows that true bipartisanship is possible. And maybe it'll be thriving, if we're going to get something done. When Republicans and Democrats talk, debate, and seek common ground, we can achieve breakthroughs that move our country forward and deliver for our citizens. And that's what we're doing today. And I have great respect for the people standing alongside of me.

I urge lawmakers in both House and Senate to work hard and to act quickly and send a final bill to my desk. And I look very much forward to signing it. This is a big breakthrough for a lot of people. They've been talking about this for many, many years.

I want to thank Jared Kushner for working so hard on the bill. Thank you, Jared. He worked very hard. He really did. He worked very hard. He feels very deeply about it. And it's my honor to be involved, and it'll be an even greater honor to sign.

So good luck, Chuck and Mike and Rand and everybody—[*laughter*—Lindsey, everybody back here. Go out and see if you can get that done. And if you can, I'm waiting. I'll be waiting with a pen. And we will have done something—[*laughter*]. We will have done something that hasn't been done in many, many years. And it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do.

Thank you all very much. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:38 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Paula White-Cain, senior pastor, New Destiny Christian Center in Apopka, FL; Memphis, TN, resident Alice Marie Johnson, whose lifetime prison sentence was commuted by the President on June 6; and White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner. He also referred to S. 756.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Canterbury, K. Charles; Cell, Paul F.; Clinton, William J.; Collins, Douglas A.; Goodlatte, Robert W.; Graham, Lindsey O.; Grassley, Charles E.; Johnson, Alice Marie; Kushner, Jared C.; Lee, Michael S.; Paul, Randal H.; Scott, Timothy E.; White-Cain, Paula.

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